

## Board Paper

### Date

27/11/2025

### Title

OEP Research

### Report Author

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### Responsible Executive Director

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### Paper for discussion

Open paper

## Summary

1. The OEP Areas of Research Interest document is a specific tool for publication on our website and that of Government Office for Science, to encourage academic and industry experts to identify where their expertise could be of value and how they can engage further with us. It also helps guide our own prioritisation of research projects within our budget.
2. The OEP Research Strategy is for internal use to help staff understand why research is important to our issue-based approach, what research we are doing at the OEP and how we prioritise, conduct and communicate our research.

## Recommendation

3. The Board is asked to consider and comment on the Areas of Research Interest document, planned for publication on our website.
4. The Board is asked to consider and comment on the internal OEP Research Strategy.

## Background

5. Since 2017, Areas of Research Interest (ARI) documents have been implemented across various government organisations. As of 2024, more than 24 government organisations have produced at least one ARI publication.

6. An ARI document sets out research ‘topics’ and ‘questions’ which articulate the research interests of government organisations that are integral to the achievement of an organisation’s medium- to long-term objectives.
7. Internally, government organisations can produce an ARI to articulate their medium and long-term evidence needs, and to benefit from additional evidence, expertise, and research insights, which could inform policy and practice. Externally, ARIs are used by academic and industry experts, communities, networks, and institutions to identify where their expertise could be of value and how they can engage further with relevant government organisations.
8. The Government Office for Science (GO-Science) supports the creation and use of ARI documents for ministerial departments, non-ministerial departments, devolved administrations, executive agencies, and non-departmental public bodies. In September 2023, the new GO-Science ARI Database launched to provide a searchable platform for all government ARI questions.
9. ARI documents from relevant departments:
  - a. [Defra group research and innovation interests - GOV.UK](#)
  - b. [Food Standards Agency: Areas of Research Interest - GOV.UK](#)
  - c. [EPA-Thematic-Research-Priorities-2024-2026.pdf](#)

## Analysis

### Areas of Research Interest Document

10. The purpose of our Areas of Research Interest document is to set out the areas where the OEP would like further evidence and information to support its work over the next 2-5 years. At the College of Experts Day 2025 when asked for feedback on how the College could engage more with the OEP, they requested more information on what the OEP’s research interests were. This would mean they could engage with and share with us relevant research and timely information within their wider networks to help draw insights from a range of different sources to support our work. It will also serve as the basis for discussion with research funders, including UKRI, to encourage investments in research areas of importance to the OEP, as encouraged by Board at its earlier meetings.
11. It was developed using our current information gathering mechanisms such as our EIP analysis, horizon scanning survey, analysis of our complaints. Through engagement with our internal experts within our programmes, functions (and subsequently through our College of Experts) the questions were refined and prioritised based strategic intent of taking action and whether further information was needed to act.
12. Issues were discounted for a number of reasons; it was felt there was already enough research known in the area on the issue to understand why and how we should act if we chose to, there was no opportunity for the OEP to act on the findings of any research, or we were not best placed to do so, or we were already conducting work in the area.
13. Focusing and stating our areas of research interest will improve our engagement with other government departments and public bodies, funders, suppliers and researchers, including

our College of Experts, to support our work by informing OEP of existing evidence and working with OEP to shape new research.

14. The research questions in this document are not intended to be answered only by the research we do at the OEP. They represent the broad scope of our research interest, and we will use them to engage with external stakeholders to understand how their research can help us to answer them. This includes evidence on issues we do not immediately prioritise.
15. The research questions and associated engagement will support our understanding and will enable us to focus the evidence we commission to the most significant research interests across the organisation where there is a gap in the evidence base not being filled by others. It is not intended that this will be a set business plan for evidence gathering over the next 5 years. It will support our decision making rather than directing decisions so it will not solely define the research we do at the OEP.

### **OEP Research Strategy**

16. As a small organisation, the role of commissioned evidence is critical. This provides the necessary assurance to act confidently on new and complex issues. It remains a valuable tool in guiding our decision-making processes.
17. The purpose of the OEP research strategy is ensure the commissioned research needs of the organisation are met in a way that maximises the value gained from our research and enables us to identify and rapidly respond to opportunities to influence on major and impactful environmental issues. It is an internal document to help OEP staff to develop and continually improve our access to the best available science, knowledge, and expertise.
18. Our approach to research at the OEP aims to:
19. Provide timely, impactful research to inform organisational decisions and actions.
20. Support our statutory work monitoring progress towards targets and other commitments, Environmental Improvement Plans and other key goals.
  - Support our statutory work monitoring and reporting on the implementation of environmental law.
  - Facilitate dialogue about OEP research interests with the OEP College of Experts, research institutes, industry experts, and other government departments and arms-length bodies.
  - Promote our research interests to encourage expert participation in identifying relevant evidence.

### **Implementation Timescale**

21. After the Board's feedback has been implemented. The research questions will be considered by OEP staff in light of the strategy discussions for any further prioritisation required.
22. To ensure our research questions are clear and relevant for external academic and industry experts, we will test the research questions with our College of Experts.

23. Finally, our Executive Committee will provide final approval before the areas of research interest document is uploaded to our website and submitted to GO-Science.

## Communications

27. The ARI document would be published on our website and updated as and when new research questions arise. It would be communicated via our existing networks and via the GO-Science network and database.

## External Stakeholders

24. We have engaged with GO-Science, Defra, Natural England, Food Standards Agency and the Irish Environmental Protection Agency to learn from the development of their research strategies and avoid duplication where relevant.
25. We are part of the cross-Government network of ARI officials, chaired by GO-Science, which meets bi-monthly to share experiences and knowledge.

Paper to be published	YES
Publication date (if relevant)	With meeting minutes